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ABSTRACT

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte's "Seven-Year Student Development Plan" identified phases, steps, goals, and activities associated with attracting and supporting undergraduate, postbaccalaureate, and graduate students prior to, during, and for 1 year after their enrollment in the university's teacher education program. Phase 1 of the development of the plan involved advertisement, recruitment, and initial student orientation. Many of the Phase 1 actions capitalized on the ongoing activities of other campus offices. Significant efforts were devoted to direct correspondence with students in local high schools and community colleges. The school had difficulty recruiting ethnic minorities. Phase 2 involved orientation, socialization, academic advising, and preparation for teacher education. The first year of implementing the plan suggested that the steps and goals of Phase 2 were satisfactory, though about 20 percent of freshman and sophomore pre-education students changed their majors out of education, and there were no attempts to determine the reason for departure. Phase 3 involved academic advising, student teaching, and teacher licensure. This stage was also satisfactory. However, student scores on the Praxis II Specialty Area tests were low, so students need more help preparing for them. Phase 4 involved graduate surveys and review/revision of the "Seven-Year Student Development Plan." Results found that graduates were positive about the program. The employment rate for the graduates in local school districts was about 93 percent. (SM)

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The Seven-Year Student Development Plan -- A One-Year Retrospective

Dawson R. Hancock, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Many of our nation's Colleges, Schools, and Departments of Education conduct activities, such as recruiting, orientation, enrollment, registration, financial assistance, academic advising, program audits, student teaching, and professional licensing, designed to support students' progress while enrolled in their teacher education programs. Unfortunately, in many educational environments, these efforts are implemented inequitably and coordinated poorly. As a result, students become confused and discouraged, institutional resources are misused, and the reputations of the teacher education programs are diminished. This paper reviews one institution's first year of implementing a comprehensive, integrated, and chronological plan to avoid these problems. The University of North Carolina at Charlotte's *Seven-Year Student Development Plan* identifies phases, steps, goals, and activities associated with attracting and supporting undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students prior to, during, and after their enrollment in a teacher education program. In addition to assisting students and faculty involved in teacher education throughout the nation, this *Plan* may serve as a model for other institutions of higher education that wish to develop strategies to satisfy the particular needs of their students.

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The *Seven-Year Student Development Plan* -- A One-Year Retrospective

In institutions of higher education throughout the country, colleges, schools, and departments of education prepare students to become school teachers, counselors, and administrators. In conjunction with this principle task, most of these institutions provide services and activities designed to support students' progress while enrolled in their teacher education programs (Carnegie Forum, 1986). Most often, these services and activities include advertisement, recruiting, orientation, course enrollment, registration, financial assistance, academic advising, program audits, student teaching, and professional licensing (Holmes Group, 1990). Unfortunately, students' responses on surveys and other indicators suggest that these institutional efforts are often implemented inequitably and coordinated poorly (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). As a result, students become confused and discouraged, institutional resources are misused, and the reputations of the teacher education programs are lessened. In early 1996, the College of Education at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte sought to rectify these problems through implementation of a broad reaching and ambitious *Seven-Year Student Development Plan* (Hancock, 1997).

Objective

Charged with providing all necessary academic support services for students involved in teacher education at UNC Charlotte, the College of Education's newly established Office of Student Academic Services began in the spring of 1996 to develop a comprehensive, integrated, and chronological plan to guide its activities. After months of effort, the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan* evolved. In short, the *Plan's* primary purpose was to identify activities associated with attracting and supporting undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students prior to, during, and for one year after their enrollment in the University's teacher education programs.

During academic year 1996-97, the Office of Student Academic Services' staff, comprised of a Director, Licensure Advisor, Academic Advisor, and two secretaries, sought to appropriately allocate their time and energy and to prudently spend a $13,000 budget in support of the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan.* To benefit the students and faculty involved in teacher education throughout the nation and to benefit other institutions of higher education that may wish to use the *Plan* to satisfy the particular needs of their students, this paper outlines the specific actions taken in support of the *Plan* during its first year of existence. In addition, the paper begins to evaluate the effectiveness of those actions and recommends modifications to the *Plan* in order to maximize its effectiveness during future years of implementation.

The original four-phase *Seven-Year Student Development Plan*, as defined in August 1996, identified the steps, goals, and activities outlined in enclosure 1.

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Specific Actions in Phase #1

During the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan*'s first year of existence, specific actions in support of Phase #1 (Advertisement, Recruitment, and Initial Orientation) included:

1) Participation in fifteen Student Orientation, Advisement, and Registration (SOAR) sessions sponsored by the Office of the Dean of Students, four UNC Charlotte Open Houses sponsored by the Office of Admissions, two non-traditional student orientations sponsored the Office of Adult Students and Evening Services, one Parents' Day luncheon sponsored by the Office of Development, and one College Fair sponsored by the City of Charlotte;

2) Coordination with the Undergraduate Office of Admissions to conduct a weekly briefing to all prospective students interested in becoming school teachers;

3) Coordination with the Undergraduate Office of Admissions to receive monthly a list of the names and addresses of students who have been accepted to the University but who have not decided to enroll in order to target these students for aggressive recruitment;

4) Revision and distribution of information sheets on the College of Education's goals, mission, academic programs, teacher licensure procedures, and admission requirements;

5) Creation of a "frequently asked questions" information sheet for students visiting the Office of Student Academic Services; and

6) Advisement of representatives of the Undergraduate and Graduate Offices of Admissions, Registrar's Office, Office of Adult Students and Evening Services, Administrative Council, and Academic Advising Improvement Team regarding the complete range of teacher licensure programs offered through the College of Education.

Evaluation of Specific Actions in Phase #1

Strengths

Many actions of Phase #1 capitalized on the ongoing activities of other offices on campus. This tactic minimized duplication of effort and maximized opportunities to interact with large audiences of prospective students. In addition, we discovered that these collaborative efforts naturally and unavoidably informed representatives of other offices of the opportunities available in teacher education. In most cases, the offices with which our efforts were joined truly appreciated our actions to reach out to them and to support their attempts to recruit and inform potential students.

Furthermore, creation of an undergraduate program brochure and supporting literature proved to be a highly useful task. These documents filled a long-existing void in basic information about education programs at the University which needed to be distributed to prospective and newly enrolled students. With the publication of these documents, we discovered that the demand on our time to answer fundamental questions was reduced, thereby allowing the staff and faculty to spend more time addressing more complex and/or career-oriented questions of students. In addition, the process of creating these documents allowed us to address and resolve many previously ambiguous issues.

Active measures to recruit students had the unanticipated positive effect of enrolling students who were generally better informed and more prepared than other students to handle the challenges of their initial year at the University. Prior to initiation of Phase #1, few concentrated efforts had been focused on recruitment. As a result, students had often arrived at our University virtually unaware of the requirements or expectations of our programs. The discussions and interactions involved in recruitment of students served the very constructive purpose of socializing and familiarizing them with an array of important issues related to becoming effective students.

Weaknesses

Although significant efforts were devoted to direct correspondence with students in local high schools and community colleges, few systematic efforts were directed toward interaction with guidance counselors and advisors in these environments. As a result, many potential University students were never identified. In addition, directing prospective students to local high school and community college counselors

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and advisors who were unknowledgeable about our University's teacher education opportunities often tended to confuse and discourage students from considering teaching as a career.

An outgrowth of our aggressive recruitment actions was a large increase in incoming telephone calls and written correspondence from prospective students and parents who wanted to know more about our programs. At times, these inquiries were of sufficient quantity as to detract our attention from the more important task of serving the needs of students already enrolled in our teacher education programs. A solution which helped resolve the problem was to create and distribute a "frequently asked questions" sheet and to hire undergraduate student workers to answer many of the basic inquiries about our programs.

Although Phase #1 served the general need to advertise our programs and recruit more students, our desire to attract ethnic minority students into teacher education programs and male and female students into programs in which their genders are under-represented was not realized. The College's enrollment rate of ethnic minorities remains a full five percent lower than the University's minority enrollment rate and significantly lower than the percentage of minority teachers in the local public school districts. Furthermore, only twelve of the approximately two-hundred and fifty currently enrolled Elementary Education students are male, and less than thirty percent of the Secondary Education science teachers are female.

Recommended Modifications for Phase #1

A year of experience implementing the *Plan* suggests that the steps and goals of Phase #1 are satisfactory. However, minor modifications to the activities contained in the first phase should be considered. For example, to address the under-representation of ethnic minorities and other special populations in teacher education programs, future efforts should focus more specifically on familiarizing members of these populations with the benefits of a career in teaching. To accomplish this goal, we should aggressively solicit the support of organizations which routinely interact with these populations. In addition, we should consider active recruitment of teacher assistants -- a population already committed to teaching and with members who may be interested in and qualified to gain a teaching license.

In an attempt to better inform prospective students, we should take definitive actions to inform local high school and community college guidance counselors and advisors about the opportunities for their students who become involved in teacher education at our University. Toward that end, we may want to sponsor on-campus workshops to which representatives of various local institutions would be invited in order to learn more about our programs. We may want to visit selected schools in order to provide information, distribute literature, and answer questions.

Specific Actions in Phase #2

Specific actions taken during the first year of implementation of the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan*'s Phase #2 (Orientation, Socialization, Academic Advisement, and Preparation for Teacher Education) included:

1) Securing the assurance of the Undergraduate Office of Admissions to mail welcome letters to all incoming undergraduate Pre-Education students who intend to pursue a major and/or teaching license through the College of Education;

2) Meeting with approximately 1,100 undergraduate and post-baccalaureate Pre-Education students and assisting them with their academic programs, schedules, and other concerns related to their enrollment at UNC Charlotte;

3) Mailing approximately 2,200 personalized letters to undergraduate and post-baccalaureate Pre-Education students informing them of academic issues related to their programs;

4) Conducting six orientation sessions for Pre-Education students currently enrolled at UNC Charlotte;

5) Conducting two information sessions for prospective or currently enrolled lateral entry students employed in twelve local school districts;

6) Creating an extensive Office of Student Academic Services homepage on the Internet which provides a wealth of information about the College of Education's student support services;

7) Incorporating recent program and course designation changes into new Academic Planning Worksheets for the Elementary Education, Middle Grades Education, Secondary Education, Special Education: Mental Handicaps, Child and Family Development (Non-Licensure), Child and Family Development (Birth-Kindergarten Licensure), and Foreign Language programs;

8) Coordinating with the Graduate Office of Admissions to receive a weekly listing of the names and addresses of recently admitted post-baccalaureate licensure-only students in order to contact and advise these students;

9) Creating a brochure outlining North Carolina Lateral Entry Procedures and disseminating the brochure to several hundred students and school district representatives;

10) Coordinating with academic departments within the College of Education, the College of Arts and Sciences, and with the Registrar's Office for 310 "block schedule" seats for Pre-Education students; and

11) Providing the LearningPlus computer tutorial, Praxis I study guides, and student-faculty discussion panels to assist student preparation for the Praxis I examination.

Evaluation of Specific Actions in Phase #2

Strengths

In order to most effectively orient and academically advise students, Phase #2 maximized opportunities to collectively inform groups of students about various issues related to their education programs. For example, the six Pre-Education student orientation sessions allowed for discussions with large groups of students who would have otherwise needed one-on-one advisement. Similarly, the two information sessions for prospective or currently enrolled lateral entry students efficiently addressed the concerns of large audiences from twelve local school districts. To have talked individually with all of these Pre-Education students or to have visited all of the lateral entry students in their own districts would have been a less efficient use of our time and resources.

Helping students as they prepared for the Praxis I examination resulted in higher passing rates and improved rapport with students. For example, our purchase of the LearningPlus computer tutorial allowed many students to identify their weaknesses and improve their basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Placement in the University library of several Praxis I study guides provided free access to these useful preparation materials. Referrals of selected students to the University Learning Center in order to receive specialized academic remediation helped some students improve their weak areas. Written feedback

suggested that students appreciated all of these efforts and viewed our actions as a reflection of genuine concern for their well-being in our education programs.

For prospective and currently enrolled lateral entry students, creation and distribution of a booklet which detailed all required lateral entry processes was extremely well-received by students, faculty, and representatives of the local school districts. This document identified lateral entry criteria, definitions of key terms, the responsibilities of lateral entry teachers, institutions of higher education, school districts, and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and the names and telephone numbers of program representatives at UNC Charlotte.

Weaknesses

Although many Phase #2 actions successfully welcomed and informed Pre-Education students, about twenty percent of all freshman and sophomore Pre-Education students changed their majors from education to another academic discipline during the year. Unfortunately, no attempts were made to determine the reasons for their departure. Although some of those students certainly left education for legitimate reasons, nothing within the *Plan* prompted contact with these students in order to identify potential problems with the support services cited in the *Plan*.

The academic advisors in the Office of Student Academic Services conducted over 1,100 one-on-one advisement sessions with undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students during the year. The quality of advice was outstanding. However, on occasion, students asked questions which could have been answered more effectively and/or with more creditability by a fellow student. Although opportunities for the effective use of peer advisors emerged, no peer advisement system had been created within the *Plan* to accommodate this need.

Pre-Education students admitted to a teacher education program at the conclusion of Phase #2 were recognized with well-deserved congratulatory letters and certificates of achievement. In addition, these students were assigned teaching faculty advisors who welcomed the opportunity to provide program and career advice. However, students denied admission to a teacher education program because of failure to complete one or more admission prerequisites did not always receive the same level of personalized attention. More deliberate attempts could have been made to help these students overcome their academic weaknesses which prevented their admission to a teacher education program or to choose another academic path.

Recommended Modifications for Phase #2

The first year of implementing the *Plan* suggests that the steps and goals of Phase #2 are satisfactory. However, as with Phase #1, minor modifications to the activities contained in the second phase should be considered. For example, as part of their routine duties, academic advisors should contact each student who submits a form to change her or his major to another academic subject in order to determine those students' reasons for leaving education. To the extent that the opinions gathered are related to academic services provided by the Office of Student Academic Services, future modifications to the *Plan* should be considered.

To assist students struggling to gain admission to a teacher education program, academic advisors should become aware of the full range of local on and off-campus referral agencies to which they may send students who need specific remediation. In addition, literature published by those agencies should be obtained and readily distributed to students who have a need to use the services offered by the agencies. Career opportunities in disciplines related to education should be identified in order to effectively advise students who may need to consider changing to a non-education major.

Finally, implementation of a peer advising system should be considered. With clearly defined responsibilities, qualified and well-trained student advisors could assist with the dissemination of a wealth of information needed by fellow students. In many cases, allowing student advisors to assist with the advising load would provide professional advisors additional time to devote to more complex advising issues.

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Specific Actions in Phase #3

During the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan*'s first year of implementation, specific actions in support of Phase #3 (Academic Advisement, Student Teaching, and Teacher Licensure) included:

1) Chairing and staffing the *Teacher Education Program Implementation Workgroup* -- a committee comprised of eighteen faculty members from across campus which met nine times to discuss and coordinate the University's teacher education efforts;

2) Conducting periodic meetings with the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Registrar, Director of the Undergraduate Admissions Office, Director of the Graduate Admissions Office, Chair of the UNC Charlotte Academic Advising Improvement Team, President of the Faculty Council, Director of Adult Students and Evening Services, Director of Academic Planning and Institutional Research, and Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences to discuss issues of concern to students involved in teacher education at UNC Charlotte;

3) Assisting students involved in teacher education by processing 459 applications for admission to a teacher education program, 710 requests for transcript evaluations from post-baccalaureate licensure-only students, 380 licensure applications, 460 special requests, 86 requests for transient study, 185 applications for admission to master's degree candidacy, 23 graduate transfer credit requests, 86 change of grade requests, and at least 76 additional miscellaneous documents;

4) Using the Student Information System, "Student View System," and FOCUS data base to review the academic schedules of over 1,800 undergraduate and post-baccalaureate education students in order to ensure their enrollment in program-supporting courses;

5) Participating in a Praxis workshop and a student-faculty discussion panel designed to assist student preparation for the Praxis II examination;

6) Developing and distributing detailed reports to faculty regarding UNC Charlotte students' performance on the Praxis II tests;

7) Participating in the College of Education's Student Teacher orientations to help Student Teachers prepare for the Praxis II tests and for submission of their licensure applications to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction;

8) Attending meetings of the College of Education's academic departments in order to address faculty questions related to teacher education;

9) Assisting the initiation or renewal of teacher licenses for over forty-five faculty; and

10) Serving as the central source of teacher education information for faculty.

Evaluation of Specific Actions in Phase #3

Strengths

Seeking and using available technological resources to advise students allowed for timely, frequent, and informative interactions between advisors and students. For example, advisors and faculty made regular use of electronic mail to share information quickly and to a wide audience. Similarly, development of an extensive Office of Student Academic Services' homepage on the Internet allowed for broad dissemination of large amounts of information of importance to education students. Establishment of a computer terminal within the Office in order to access the "Student View System" provided students the ability to immediately acquire copies of academic schedules, transcripts, and other information vital to their academic progression. Creation of a student information data base, used in conjunction with existing University records, allowed for rapid and continuous correspondence with students.

Prior to the establishment of the *Teacher Education Program Implementation Workgroup*, teacher education efforts between the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences were sometimes poorly coordinated. The collaborative efforts which ensued after the creation of this workgroup contributed significantly to improved understanding and mutual respect between the faculty members of the two colleges. As a result, many problems which had existed prior to the workgroup's establishment were

resolved. In addition, faculty members of both colleges began to view the workgroup as an effective forum for discussion of a whole range of issues related to teacher education.

Proactive efforts to discuss teacher education topics with key University administrative officials helped identify many potential barriers to students' progression toward graduation and licensing. Prior to initiation of the *Plan*, interactions with these officials had occurred on an *ad hoc* basis and only when a problem had been encountered. Reacting to problems rather than meeting periodically in order to prevent problems had characterized our involvement with key administrators. Establishment of ongoing liaison with officials who routinely influenced our students' academic lives helped preempt many potential difficulties.

Weaknesses

Although our efforts to help students prepare for the Praxis II Specialty Area tests positively impacted student performance, average scores on selected tests remain low. On some tests (e.g., Comprehensive Social Studies and English), performance levels are well below the State-mandated 70% passing rate. In those areas, a concerted effort should be made to assist students. Specifically, workshops should be conducted which acquaint students with the nature of the tests and which allow students to interact with faculty who can answer questions related to specific content. Additionally, faculty should be encouraged to review the curricula of selected courses to ensure that the content of those courses prepares students for the requirements of the Praxis II Specialty Area tests.

Reviewing students' files prior to submission to the Registrar's Office and to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in order to ensure satisfaction of all graduation and licensing requirements significantly reduced the quantity of errors that existed prior to establishment of the *Plan*. However, centralizing this review process drastically increased the time and effort devoted to this single endeavor. At the end of each semester, other routine actions were necessarily curtailed in order to accomplish the feat of examining all student files before they were forwarded.

Recommended Modifications for Phase #3

As with Phases #1 and #2, the steps and goals of Phase #3 are satisfactory. However, the first year of implementing the *Plan* suggests that some modifications to the activities contained in the third phase should be considered. For example, to help students prepare for the Praxis II Specialty Area tests, workshops should be designed and implemented which: (a) provide an overview of the Praxis II tests (i.e., focus, types of questions, time limits, etcetera); (b) identify specific content normally examined on the tests; (c) familiarize students with resources available to improve their performance (i.e., Tests-at-a-Glance booklets, commercial study guides, etcetera); (d) provide opportunities for students and faculty who have taken the tests to discuss them with students who have not taken the tests; (e) provide opportunities for students to write practice responses to sample questions and receive feedback from faculty; and (f) identify specific Praxis II test-taking strategies.

The quality control exercised by the Office's review of all student files before they were forwarded to the Registrar's Office and to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction resulted in radically reduced error rates. However, in the future, we must manage the workloads of the Office personnel at the end of each semester in order to allow time for this labor intensive task. In addition, we should consider the use of automated systems of checking students' files to ensure completion of graduation and licensing requirements.

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Specific Actions in Phase #4

During the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan*'s first year of existence, specific actions in support of Phase #4 (Graduate Surveys and Review/Revision of the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan*) included:

1) Seeking feedback from selected graduates regarding their experiences while completing licensure programs at UNC Charlotte;

2) Preparing and distributing post-graduation survey results which indicated students' positive perceptions of their experiences in the College of Education; and

3) Meeting weekly with all faculty and staff in the Office of Student Academic Services to review progress toward implementation of the *Seven-Year Student Development Plan*.

Evaluation of Specific Actions in Phase #4

Strengths

A post-graduation survey of the class of 1996 revealed that 89% of education students believed that their University education adequately prepared them to enter their chosen field, 92% believed that their initial employment position was directly related to their academic major, and 95% were satisfied with their initial employment position. These data suggested that recent graduates' impressions of their educational experiences and of their initial employment opportunities were quite positive.

Weekly one-hour meetings of the staff and faculty tasked to implement the *Plan* allowed continuous dialog regarding the most efficient ways to accomplish the activities identified in the *Plan*. In addition, these meetings allowed for the identification of minor refinements to the *Plan* that could be considered during the year-end review. Perhaps most importantly, these meetings helped prioritize our actions and minimize wasted time and duplicated effort. Establishment of mutual trust for each other's talents and abilities was an important by-product of our ongoing discussions.

Weaknesses

The post-graduation data cited previously were extracted from a survey administered by the University's Career Center. Although the responses of graduates of education programs were very positive, many questions on this survey were unrelated to the field of education. A survey designed exclusively for graduates of education programs should be developed. This survey should be administered at least twice during the year following graduation.

Employment rates in local school districts of our recent education program graduates is about 93%, suggesting that the school superintendents and principals in the area value our programs and desire to hire our graduates. However, few efforts have been made to systematically solicit the thoughts of public school officials regarding their impressions of our former students. In the future, efforts should be made to determine specific strengths and weaknesses of our graduates and programs as identified by our graduates' employers.

Recommended Modifications for Phase #4

In order to examine the impact of the first six years of the *Plan*, feedback from graduates, employers, and other concerned parties must be attained during the seventh year of implementation. Toward that end, a survey instrument which addresses specific portions of the *Plan* must be devised and administered. Data derived from this instrument will be important as the University continues to demonstrate the viability of its teacher preparation efforts. The assertion of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) that many of our nation's teacher education programs are deficient will make it even more imperative for our University's teacher education programs to demonstrate their worth in the future.

Summary

The *Seven-Year Student Development Plan* was created in August 1996 as a comprehensive, integrated, and chronological plan to attract and support undergraduate, post-baccalaureate, and graduate students prior to, during, and for one year after their enrollment in the University of North Carolina at Charlotte's teacher education programs. Although these goals were generally accomplished, opportunities to improve the *Plan* were realized during the *Plan's* first year of implementation. As those modifications are incorporated, the *Plan* will allow the College of Education's Office of Student Academic Services to provide even better academic support services required by students involved in the University's teacher education programs. In addition, other institutions of higher education may find the *Plan* useful as they identify activities to support the particular needs of their students.

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